

The National Animal Identification System:
A Guide for Small-Scale or Non-Commercial Producers

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH INSPECTION SERVICE

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INTRODUCTION

The National Animal Identification System (NAIS) is a cooperative State-Federal-industry partnership to standardize animal identification programs and practices of all livestock species and poultry. NAIS is a voluntary program where producers and stakeholders are invited to participate in the program to test the system and offer feedback to help ensure that a practical, cost-effective, and reliable program is developed. Premise registration, animal identification and the reporting of animal movements are essential for the rapid tracing of animals during a disease outbreak.

USDA encourages all producers to participate in NAIS. However, USDA is sensitive to the challenges faced by small-scale or non-commercial producers. In recognition of these challenges, USDA has developed this document to better explain what this program is and is not.

USDA continues to seek and receive feedback and recommendations from *all* producers as we determine, along with States and industry, how we will proceed with the system. We encourage stakeholders to make suggestions about NAIS by contacting the working group(s) for the species of animal(s) they raise. The working group information is on the left side of the NAIS Web page (www.usda.gov/nais); under “Browse by Audience” click the “Select a Working Group” drop-down button. Stakeholders can also submit comments to a particular working group via e-mail at animalidcomments@aphis.usda.gov. Please include the species name and the term “working group” in the subject line of your e-mail.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- The purpose of the NAIS is to protect U.S. agriculture by enhancing our emergency response capabilities. The system will enable us to address urgent animal health concerns as quickly and effectively as possible.
- Participation in the NAIS is voluntary. First and foremost, USDA wants to build a cooperative system that is valuable to all producers and that producers want to be a part of. There are no enforcement mechanisms or penalties related to the NAIS.
- Household pets (e.g., cats and dogs) are not covered by the NAIS.
- The NAIS covers only cattle and bison, cervids (e.g., deer and elk); goats; horses; camelids (e.g., llamas and alpacas); poultry; sheep; and swine.
- The focus of NAIS is animal health, primarily within the commercial animal production sector in which animals move from their birthplace to a subsequent location(s) over the animal’s life cycle. USDA’s NAIS efforts will largely focus on commercial operations and animals at such locations due to their higher risk of spreading diseases among multiple locations and for greater distances.

Premises:

- USDA encourages all owners of animals covered by the NAIS to register their premises.
- In all States, premises registration is currently free.

Animal identification and tracking:

- If your animals never leave the farm of birth or are only moved for custom slaughter for personal consumption, you will not be asked to identify them or report their movement.
- Animal owners who choose to participate in the animal identification and tracking components of the NAIS, are not expected to report all animal movements. For instance, taking your animal on a trail ride with a neighbor or moving livestock from pasture to pasture within your operation pose a low risk of spreading disease, and therefore, are not reportable.
- Reportable movements are those that involve a high risk of spreading disease, such as moving livestock from a farm to an event where a large numbers of animals are brought together from many sources.
- USDA will not track animals in real-time. USDA has no interest in knowing where animals are all of the time. Data concerning animal movements and locations will be held in multiple, secure databases managed by private organizations and state animal health authorities.
- USDA will only request animal identification data to respond to an animal disease outbreak or other emerging animal health concern.
- USDA fully recognizes that NAIS must be practical and affordable for all sectors of agriculture.
- For producers who choose to obtain official identification numbers/devices for their animals, the costs would vary depending on the number of animals and type of identification used. Some livestock are already identified as part of ongoing disease control programs, and USDA is working to incorporate those existing ID systems into the NAIS to minimize or eliminate any further costs to producers.
- Animal tracking databases will be privately held; we anticipate that producers who voluntarily choose to participate in the animal tracking component of NAIS will have various options and that competition between databases will help keep costs down.
- USDA is not mandating what technique or device should be used to identify animals. Appropriate means of identifying animals vary by species. What works for one species may not work for another. This is a decision best left to the producers themselves.

- Group/Lot ID is an option for animals that move as a group through the production chain (i.e., groups of pigs or chickens). USDA recognizes that tagging every individual animal is not always practical.
- Information in the NAIS will only be used by Federal and State authorities in responding to disease outbreaks. This happens relatively rarely, but when it does happen, the faster we can address the disease threat, the sooner everyone can resume business as usual.

GUIDANCE FOR NON-COMMERCIAL PRODUCER PARTICIPANTS

The NAIS participation guidelines for small, non-commercial producers is based on how they manage (move, market, etc.) animals and the associated risk of disease exposure and spread.

Definition of Non-Commercial Producer

Under the NAIS, the following criteria describe non-commercial producers:

1. Individuals whose animals are not moved to auction barns or from their location to those of commercial producers.
2. Individuals whose animal movements are limited to those moved directly to custom slaughter; movement within a single producer's premises; local fairs and local 4-H events.

Guidance for Non-Commercial Producers

Premises Registration:

USDA encourages, but does not require, all livestock and poultry owners to register their premises with the animal health authority in their State, regardless of the size of their operations or the number of animals present at the facility.

Voluntary registration of premises does not obligate producers to identify their animals or to report the premises-to-premises movement of their animals.

Animal diseases can affect producers of all sizes. Swift moving, highly contagious diseases such as highly pathogenic avian influenza and exotic Newcastle disease can harm small-scale producers as much as large-scale producers. Diseases can spread through a variety of sources — human contact, tainted food or water supplies, insects, airborne viruses, or migratory birds — and the number of animals, their source(s), the location of the event, and the health status and certification of animals all influence the potential for disease spread.

Animal Identification and Reporting Animal Movements:

Scenarios that would not call for animals to be identified and/or movements reported in the NAIS include:

- animals that never leave the farm/location of birth;
- animals moved from their birth premises directly to custom slaughter for personal use of the animal's owner;
- livestock moved from pasture-to-pasture within one's operation;
- participation in local fairs and parades;
- the local trading of birds among private individuals; and
- animals that “get out” and cross over into the neighbor's land.

Also, animals used for recreational purposes do not need to be identified if they are permanently cared for at their birth premises. Taking your animal on a trail ride with a neighbor would not be a reportable movement.

Comprehensive recommendations for identifying animals and reporting movements are in development in cooperation with the species-specific working groups and State-Federal animal health authorities.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR NON-COMMERCIAL PRODUCERS

1. Why should the small-scale producer care about NAIS? Isn't the only benefit to large-scale commercial producer and exporters?

Animal diseases can affect producers of all sizes. Swift moving, highly contagious diseases such as highly pathogenic avian influenza and exotic Newcastle disease can harm small-scale producers as much as large-scale producers. Based on these facts, we believe that all producers can benefit from a national animal identification system.

NAIS will allow animal health officials to quickly access information that is accurate and necessary to respond to disease situations. With the ability to know rapidly where animals are and which animals have moved recently, animal health officials can take the best actions possible to stop a disease's spread and alert producers — small and large — of what they can do to protect their animals.

Although APHIS' NAIS focus is on commercial operations, all producers are encouraged to register their premises.

2. If I raise animals for my own use (i.e., consumption), will I need to participate in NAIS?

If your animals never leave the farm of birth or are only moved for custom slaughter for personal consumption, you would not be asked under the Federal guidelines to identify them or report their movement. USDA encourages all owners of animals covered by NAIS to register their premises, regardless of the number of animals present, because many animal diseases (such as avian influenza, foot-and-mouth disease, and vesicular stomatitis) can be spread whether an animal leaves its home premises or not.

3. Will cats and dogs need to be included in the NAIS?

No. Household pets (e.g., cats and dogs) and other animal species not listed in Question 3 are not reportable to the NAIS.

4. Why should horses be included in NAIS?

NAIS is intended for use in responding to any highly contagious animal health concern among U.S. livestock and poultry. Horses can be infected with and transmit diseases of interest such as streptococcus equi (strangeles), equine infectious anemia (swamp fever), rhinopneumonitis (Herpes II), salmonellosis, and vesicular stomatitis, among many other diseases. NAIS could allow USDA to quickly contain and eradicate a disease before it spreads outside a given area.

5. Will NAIS require that all animal movements be reported? Will I have to record all trail rides and which properties I cross?

No. Recording all animal movements would not be practical, nor is that the intention with NAIS. Reportable movements under the NAIS would include movements with a high potential for spreading disease (i.e., movements where animals commingle with other animals). By recording the movement of animals as they come in contact with other animals, animal health officials will be able to quickly identify exposed animals and stop the spread of disease.

There are a number of factors that can influence whether an animal movement activity may pose a disease risk. Certainly, some events pose greater risk of disease transmission than others. The number of animals, their source(s), the location of the event, and the health status and certification of the animals, for example, all influence the degree of disease risk in a given situation.

For example, taking your animal on a trail ride with a neighbor or moving livestock from pasture to pasture within your operation would pose a relatively low risk of spreading disease. It would be unnecessary from a disease standpoint to report all movements in such “low-risk” situations. If additional risk factors come into play, it would then be necessary to consider recording the animal movement. For example, if livestock are moved from a farm to a state or national exhibition—or other events with large numbers of animals from

many sources—the possibility of spreading disease becomes a factor. These types of “high-risk” movements will be the priority to report.

State and Federal animal health officials are working with the NAIS working groups to develop recommendations for the specific types of movement that may pose a disease risk for each species and should be reported.

6. How could someone’s backyard animals be a “risk” to others?

Even animals that never leave the farm or have contact with other animals are at risk for catching and transmitting disease. Having a small number of animals can put you at risk of being impacted by a disease outbreak. Recent situations such as the 2002-2003 outbreak of exotic Newcastle disease in U.S. poultry show that backyard animals can serve as reservoirs for disease and contribute to disease spread. Thus, premises registration would help to reduce the risk of disease in backyard flocks.

7. What does the government plan to do with NAIS information? Who will use or have access to the NAIS data?

First, USDA will not be “tracking” animals in real-time. USDA has no interest in where all animals are all of the time. In fact, NAIS is designed in a way that ensures this will not happen. The information concerning animal movement and location data will be held in multiple, secure databases managed by private organizations and state animal health authorities. USDA will only request data and combine information from the databases when animal health officials need information to respond to an animal disease outbreak or other emerging animal health concern. This limitation will be explicitly outlined in the cooperative agreements with private database owners.

8. As a small-scale producer, what’s this going to cost me?

For all producers, the costs associated with NAIS will vary and are somewhat connected to their involvement with each of NAIS’ three parts: premises identification, animal identification, and the animal tracking databases.

In all States, premises registration is currently free. Many small producers may choose to participate only in the premises identification component. If so, NAIS would result in minimal to no expense for them. Other costs associated with NAIS only arise when a producer voluntarily chooses to identify individual animals or groups of animals.

For producers who choose to apply official identification numbers/devices to their animals, the costs would vary with the number and type of animal identification used. Some livestock already require identification for disease control purposes, and USDA is working to incorporate existing ID systems into NAIS. Animals identified under such existing systems may not bring additional costs for some producers.

Because the animal tracking database infrastructure is still being developed, and it is to be privately held, it is difficult to discuss costs for this part of NAIS with any accuracy. But, because these will be privately held databases, we anticipate that producers will have various options and that competition among databases will help keep costs down. Again, these costs would only apply to those producers who voluntarily choose to participate in an animal tracking database.

9. How is participation with the NAIS being enforced?

Participation in the NAIS is voluntary. First and foremost, USDA wants to build a cooperative system that is valuable to all producers and that producers want to be a part of. There are no enforcement mechanisms or penalties related to the NAIS.

10. USDA has stated that, if regulations become necessary to increase participation in the NAIS, it would follow “normal rulemaking procedures” and “provide an opportunity for public comment.” What does this mean?

Rulemaking is simply the process for making regulations. Most importantly, this process provides ample opportunity for the public to comment. During this period, the public has an opportunity to participate in the development of regulations by submitting comments on a proposed rule. These comments are submitted directly to USDA and help ensure that our process benefits from a variety of perspectives on a given issue before we make any final decisions.

11. Will NAIS require that all livestock animals be microchipped?

No. The rumor that USDA will require all animals — ranging from livestock to chicks — to have microchips is false.

With regard to the question of how an animal could be identified (i.e., ear tag, tattoo, microchip, leg-banding), USDA has remained neutral. On this point, we respect the needs of different producers and different species groups. We recognize that such questions should not be answered for producers; instead, such questions would best be resolved by producers themselves.

For more information about providing input to the NAIS species-specific working groups, see the introduction at the top of this document.

12. Will NAIS require that all animals to be tagged individually?

No. USDA realizes that tagging each and every animal individually would be unrealistic and impractical. Group/lot ID is an option for both large- and small-scale producers, depending on the circumstances, such as animals that move as a group through the production chain (e.g., groups of pigs or chickens). If a producer chooses to participate in the voluntary animal identification system for a group of animals and utilizes the group/lot identification method and later removes an animal from the group, that animal should then

be identified individually. However, this would be the case with animals from any size farming operation, large or small.

13. Will NAIS put many small-scale producers out of business?

No. USDA believes strongly that small farms have an integral role in our country's system of agriculture. USDA fully recognizes that NAIS must be practical and affordable for all sectors of agriculture. This continues to be a priority for USDA as we work with State officials and producers to develop the system in greater detail.

14. What does USDA mean when they say “national herd?”

USDA uses this term to refer to all agricultural animals in the United States. Being included in the “national herd” does not imply government ownership or control.

15. Why would global positioning satellite (GPS) coordinates be used to describe my premises? Could the government use NAIS to track me via satellite?

GPS coordinates are simply latitude and longitude and mark a location on a map. If there is no mailing address at your property, latitude and longitude can be used instead to describe your property location. This does not provide any GPS tracking capability of either animals or people living at your premises.

16. What about individuals' religious freedoms?

As we make progress with developing NAIS, USDA is sensitive to individuals' religious beliefs. On this topic, many individuals have provided comments to USDA and expressed concerns about the use of certain technologies, such as computers. USDA recognizes these concerns. We are respectful of these beliefs and are committed to ensuring that workable options are available to religious communities. Again, NAIS is a voluntary program; those who have objections to the program are not required to participate.

17. How is NAIS supposed to protect food safety? Isn't testing rather than tracking of livestock more effective in ensuring food safety?

The purpose of NAIS is not food safety. The United States already has a comprehensive system of food safety policies, testing, and inspection requirements in place to ensure the safety of our products. The primary purpose of the NAIS is to enable rapid animal tracing and disease containment in the case of an animal disease outbreak or other emerging animal health concern among U.S. livestock and poultry. The need for a uniform national animal identification system is warranted to enhance our animal disease programs and ensure that we have the response capabilities necessary to address urgent animal health concerns—as quickly and effectively as possible. Maintaining the health of the national herd supports consumer confidence that the food supply is safe.

18. USDA has said that many respondents are in favor of the NAIS. How were these comments received?

On May 6, 2005, USDA published a draft NAIS strategic plan and program standards in the *Federal Register* and requested public comments from all interested parties. These documents were developed over two years with extensive input from industry and others during USDA listening sessions held around the country. The drafts reflected a plan and offered a starting point for discussions on how to move forward with the implementation of NAIS. USDA received hundreds of comments and letters related to these postings. Many of the individuals who provided comments at the public meetings and in response to the published drafts expressed support for NAIS. USDA recognizes fully, however, that the system's development and success depends upon ongoing input from all U.S. producers.